

01843

1968/03/04

S/S: BHRRead

(Deputy Office and Officer)

~~SECRET/NODIS/PACKERS~~

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

W 14
Mr. Rusk
2

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: March 4, 1968

SUBJECT: Vietnam Negotiations

Time: 12:00 to 12:45 p.m.

United States

Place: Secretary Rusk's Office

PARTICIPANTS: Secretary Rusk
Governor Harriman and Benjamin H. Read

Romania

Deputy Foreign Minister Macovescu
Ambassador Bogdan
Third Secretary Celac (interpreter)

After an opening exchange of pleasantries, Secretary Rusk asked Mr. Macovescu about the general mood in Hanoi during his (January 22-28) visit. Did the DRV appear to explore seriously the communications conveyed by the GOR or did it appear to brush these aside lightly?

MACOVESCU: As I indicated to Governor Harriman earlier I had long discussions with DRV Foreign Minister Trinh and on my last day in Hanoi with Prime Minister Pham Van Dong. My impression was that they examined my communications with care. I arrived on an evening (January 22) and met for the first time with Trinh the next morning (January 23). I then had to wait for three and

FORM 8-51 D3-1254

~~SECRET/NODIS/PACKERS~~

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 11652

JDW/sk 1/14/20

Xerox from Quick Copy

COPY LEO LIBRARY

-2-

a half days for answers (until the afternoon of January 26). My communications had been examined at the highest levels of the DRV and the reply which was communicated had been decided upon at that level. I believe that they earnestly and seriously examined their answer and did not rush their reply.

RUSK: One aspect of the situation should be mentioned so that the GOR will not under-estimate the degree of our concern. The problem is not just South Vietnam but SEA itself. I do not want to get into ideological differences or polemics, but wish you to know the extent of our concern. We know for example that North Vietnamese troops are operating in Laos. This is a serious concern to us because we reached a full agreement with the other side on this matter in the Geneva Accords of 1962. President Kennedy and Chairman Khrushchev agreed that all unauthorized troops on both sides should get out and agreed that Laos should manage its own affairs without threat of outside aggression. We accepted the terms of the 1962 Convention and recognized the Prime Minister suggested by the USSR. We accepted the coalition government in Laos. At no time since the agreement has the DRV gotten its people out or stopped using Laos as an infiltration route to South Vietnam. Hanoi has refused to let the coalition government work or the ICC function properly.

~~SECRET/NODIS/PACKERS~~

-3-

Harriman noted that the 1962 Accords have detailed provisions for troop withdrawal and non-use of Laotian territory for troops or equipment of other countries.

RUSK: We are ready even now to see 100% compliance with the 1962 Agreement on Laos by all parties concerned. In Thailand, a country with a 1000 years of independent history, the North Vietnamese are sending in guerrillas to operate against the government and institutions of the country. The DRV is ^{un}willing to cooperate with Sihanouk's efforts to maintain the neutrality of Cambodia. The Prince has been forced to say sharp things about the use that the DRV has made of parts of its territory. Hanoi's attitude towards all of its neighbors does and should have a bearing on our estimate of what it says about its desire for peace. One would think that it would be possible at least to let Cambodia remain neutral or to permit the gentle and civilized people of Laos to be at peace. The Laotians have no interest in killing each other. I recall one encounter in which the PL and Government forces agreed to put down their arms and attend together a water festival before resuming the battle. So the big problem is for us to find a way to permit

~~SECRET/NODIS/PACKERS~~

the peoples of this area to lead their own lives in peace. The tragedy is area-wide; not just South Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh is not just a North Vietnamese Nationalist. If so, he would cooperate with Souvanna Phouma and Prince Sihanouk.

MACOVESCU: I understand that Ho talked with Sihanouk last week.

RUSK: I hope that the USAF did not give you trouble in Hanoi.

MACOVESCU: (With a smile). No, thank you very much.

HARRIMAN: Mr. Macovescu has informed me that he gave the North Vietnamese the view of his government that the US had come a long way towards meeting the conditions necessary for talks to begin, but the DRV would not move.

MACOVESCU: That is so.

HARRIMAN: I am personally grateful to Mr. Macovescu and his government for their efforts and convinced that Mr. Macovescu did all that he could to convince the DRV to move toward talks.

RUSK: I too would like to express my own genuine personal gratitude to the GOR and to you personally, Mr. Macovescu. We consider that you have handled this matter seriously and with integrity. You have undertaken an arduous, difficult task and long journeys to achieve this goal. If you receive any further interest or indications from Hanoi about pursuing this channel

-5-

further we would be interested in knowing it and seeing what could be done. We have made so many proposals over the years that it has become like a grocery store. They could shop and find something at any time on Cambodia, Laos, the DMZ, POW exchange or U Thant's "stand-still" proposal. If they are willing to talk about any one of these things, to take any small step towards peace, we would be interested. Did this come up at all at Budapest?

MACOVESCU: As long as the GOR was present, there was no such discussion. There is a possibility that it came up later at Budapest and may come up at Sophia. I thank you for your words of appreciation for myself and the GOR. I would repeat what I said to Governor Harriman. The GOR is making these efforts only to contribute to the tranquility of that part of the world and to see an end to the war in Vietnam. This is our desire because we have a profound belief and conviction that improvement of the international situation posed by resolution of the Vietnam war and pacification in Southeast Asia would help establish better international relations generally and let all of us have more success in building up our own societies.

RUSK: We fully agree.

MACOVESCU: That is why we have engaged in doing what we did and to the extent desired by the parties the GOR is ready to continue its efforts in the future.

COPY LBJ LIBRARY

RUSK: Your last trip to Hanoi came at the same time as intensive DRV preparations for the winter-spring offensive in the South. Did you get any impression that they would be more interested in talks in April or May?

MACOVESCU: You said the last time I saw you (January 11) that we should not tire in our efforts to promote peace. The GOR will never tire. After I returned from Hanoi in January my Government and I had the impression that developments had stopped with Hanoi's latest reply. But as I told Governor Harriman earlier, in Hanoi also they told me that they wanted to keep this channel open.

RUSK: That is interesting.

MACOVESCU: And they told me exactly what you told me. If we ever learn anything from you to pass on, Hanoi will be ready to receive me at any time. The other day Governor Harriman stated his view that the Hanoi position was very rigid. Here we could embark on an ideological discussion, but it would not help especially at the present moment. But if I may be allowed to summarize my reply to Governor Harriman - I told him I have no interest in creating illusions. I did not want to say anything less. But my opinion, and it is not mine alone, is that the

door is not yet closed. The DRV's rigid position which appears solid as a rock may appear less inflexible in the not so remote future. The situation there develops rapidly. The influences brought to bear are great and the evolution of viewpoint is rapid. We may be approaching the moment when we can begin negotiations. Prime Minister Pham Van Dong told me, and this is only for you, Mr. Secretary, that he thought there was more flexibility on your part than had been seen before. That was one of his reactions when I informed him of your position. But I would risk too much if I told you that something would happen in April or May or June.

It is my profound conviction that they are also thinking of negotiations. When, how and under what conditions I cannot tell you. Whatever they told me I conveyed. They gave me a text indicating how they see the over-all picture, and we conveyed that authentic text. I would not hide from you, however, that the text I received was longer than the text I conveyed. The first two parts of the text contain Hanoi's assessment of the situation, including its assessment of the USG, and giving that part to you would not be helpful.

RUSK: I can imagine.

MACOVESCU: It is not so harsh. I asked them if I should present all of it to you and they said if I believed it

suitable I might pass it on. But now I think that it would not be suitable. Believe me, you lose nothing by not receiving it.

RUSK: We have confidence in your judgment on this question.

MACOVESCU: But we did convey exactly that portion of the pro-memoria document which circumscribes exactly their conditions.

RUSK: We have the means for further communications. You have men in Hanoi and here and the North Vietnamese have a representative in Bucharest.

MACOVESCU: So this is where we stand at present in this matter. We are ready to convey in both directions whatever is intended to be said. We would not hesitate to go again to Washington or Hanoi to convey such communications. I express again the GOR's belief that the USG will find the wisdom and the moral, political and material capacity to put an end to the war through discussions. Believe me I conveyed this same message to Hanoi.

RUSK: We earnestly hope that the war can be ended. We hope this for many reasons: the loss of life, the vast waste of resources which could go in to the economic and social development of Southeast Asia, including North Vietnam. The

~~SECRET/NODIS/PACKERS~~

-9-

war's contribution to general tensions is very high. It interferes with Government doing for people what is needed on both sides. We would like to bring the war to a close, under conditions which would let all small countries live in peace. We shall not lose interest in the possibilities for peace. It is our great preoccupation. And once again we appreciate the GOR and your efforts to be helpful in this regard.

MACOVESCU: I would like to express the hope, not unsupported by reality, that it will not be long before we shall see an end to the Vietnamese war. We would request you on your part to show flexibility and to be inventive in seeking solutions. At last word, the struggle in Vietnam was reaching new intensity. I would request that you study with great attention all reactions of the government in Hanoi. Thank you for this meeting and for your words of appreciation. I will not fail to convey your words faithfully to my government.

~~SECRET/NODIS/PACKERS~~